

Happy Graduation Day

A Spooked, Inc. Adventure Report

COPYRIGHT	3
PREFACE	4
THE OUTLINE	5
3pm: Late Day	6
5pm: The Sun is Setting	9
6pm: The Sun has Set	11
7pm: The Night Begins	15
11pm: The Deep Darkness of Night	21
6am: Morning Comes	24
THE CHARACTERS	26
JUSTIN FRIENDLY	27
TARA ENGELS	29
ELIZABETH TOK	30
JACQUI LANDERS	31
LEROY HAMMOND	32
DENNIS TRAY	33
GINA MACALLISTER	34
DEAN SONGHAM	35
GUS TABERN	36
JAKE HARDWICK	37
THE ENTITY	38

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Be aware that the Preface section has some mention of "Spooked, Inc.", a work that is copyrighted to Precis Intermedia. The Preface section exists for informational purposes and does not comprise the body of the work; it can be stripped out for anyone interested in taking advantage of the main body of the work itself.

PREFACE

The inspiration for this project came when I found a copy of a roleplaying game called “Spooked, Inc.”, by Precis Intermedia. The game itself was inspired by the Ghostbusters franchise, and seems to have been generally intended for light-hearted gameplay. I didn’t have any experience with role-playing games, especially in a solo capacity, but, after watching some videos and reading some articles on the process, I crafted together a basic one-shot and used Being the MASTER in Solo RPG from DriveThruRPG. I also used the supplements 100 Hallucinations and Visions for a Fantasy Setting and 100 Creepy Things and Events to Find in a Spooky House in order to provide some random experiences to work with.

With all my tools in hand, I started the game and made a note every time something new happened. I only used the supplements on a few occasions, but they were surprisingly effective at forcing unanticipated developments. After the game was over, I set everything aside for a few days, coming back later to expand the notes into a series of narrative plot points. Although the game is meant to be more light-hearted, I myself am not very skilled with comedy, so I presented the in-game company, “Spooked, Inc.”, as “The Company” and generally gave it a more sinister aspect throughout the game. Although I have posted this for others to use, for myself this was just a creative exercise and nothing more. It is for this reason that I decided to release the work as-is, rather than spend time expanding it into something else.

Although I am not interested in expanding on the outline myself, I hope that others find this document useful. Please feel free to take advantage of the document for any projects you might have. Thank you for your time, and good luck.

THE OUTLINE

3pm: Late Day

The investigators arrive at the location, initially just two vehicles, one person per vehicle. The location is a warehouse at an industrial area of the city of a small unnamed city. The investigators were summoned to the location at the request of “The Company” to investigate frightening paranormal activity at an artist co-op, the case being assigned to them via an app on their smartphones.

The weather is bright and sunny, with a slight wind, but as the first two investigators, Dean Songham and Gina Macallister get out to greet each other, Gina notes that the weather is more chilly than she expected. Dean is a loner with occult research experience while Gina is a fringe scientist who does much-ridiculed research in the paranormal.

Dean and Gina recognize each other from another case a year or so back. Gina notices that Dean is very nervous and looking about in a slightly paranoid manner. She asks if he is all right, and he notes that the company has been sending him on a lot of higher-level cases, and it has left him twitchy. Gina is sympathetic, and tries to reassure him that she doesn’t think this will be an intense assignment; there are only four investigators and two of them don’t appear to be experienced. Dean worries that this might be “Graduation Day”. Gina again tries to reassure him that everything will be all right, and that it's probably a simple “crazy person” case.

The other two investigators appear, each in their own vehicle. Gus Tabern is a techie with an exuberant personality, while Jake Hardwick is a militant prepper who is strategic and calm. Gina goes to greet Gus while Dean goes to greet Jake. Once introductions are made, the four turn to the warehouse where Justin Friendly is waiting inside near the main entrance.

The four investigators go to greet Justin, and everyone introduces themselves. Dean is too busy nervously evaluating the surroundings, but Gus, Gina and Jake all

see that Justin is exhausted and seems barely holding on to his sanity. Justin leads the group through the main entrance, past a hallway, into the main gallery. While the others start setting up the equipment, Justin shows Gina around. Gina records the discussion on her sound recorder. The gallery is the largest room in the building, with multiple doors leading to a hallway that snakes around the room and leads to a performance space and artist classrooms. Justin expresses displeasure with how the layout was arranged, but he was not the one “in charge” of converting the warehouse to an artist co-op; that was up to Tara Engels, the head of the co-op. He expresses this with a slight hint of misgiving. Gina asks where the others are, and Justin quickly mentions that he thought it was best that they stay out of the building until the paranormal events were dealt with. He says this with an air of authority, as if he was someone who took charge and informed the other what needed to be done.

When asked about the others, Justin explains that there were four of them: Justin, Tara, Leroy, Jacqui, and Elizabeth. Justin, somewhat dismissively, adds Dennis, the local handyman, but in Justin's words, “not a real artist”. Gina notices this, but politely decides not to follow up. Instead, she asks if his name is really Justin Friendly, and Justin, somewhat embarrassed, admits that he change his name to make himself more marketable as an artist; he used to work in insurance, but felt a calling for something more important and changed his name to be more marketable.

While Gina and Justin talk, Dean, Jake, and Gus are setting up equipment. Gus has taken over a table, and is listening to music on his tablet through a set of earbuds. As he listens to the music, he ensures his tablet can connect to an electro-magnetic detector via Bluetooth. On the table are more Bluetooth-enabled equipment such as a video camera with thermal imaging features, a digital voice recorder, remote-controlled lights, and combined electro-magnetic and motion

detector. Jake and Dean walk in with more equipment; Dean has brought in an electro-magnetic receiver kit, and a handheld paranormal response device, which has a digital display allowing paranormal entities to select from yes/no questions, numbers, or letters. Jake has brought in a set of binoculars, a gas mask, and an infrared sensor kit, including a stand. Jake asks Gus if he is listening to anything good, and Gus starts moonwalking back and forth. Jake and Dean smile and take the lights to set up around the gallery.

As they set up the lights, Jake suggests that Gus stop using earbuds so they can all hear the music, but Dean responds that this is against protocol; playing loud music can upset any supernatural entities and possibly pollute any sensor readings. Jake asks Dean if he really believes in all the “hocus-pocus”. Dean asks Jake if Jake believes it, and Jake responds that he hasn’t seen anything other than people who want to think they’re special, or perhaps mentally ill, but the job pays well. Dean asks Jake how he found out about the job, and Jake says that he spends a lot of money on building a fallout shelter with enough supplies for him and his family. While working out the expenses at a bar one evening, he overheard a couple talking about the company and where to call to fill out an application. Jake called, was set up with an account at a website, and has been working for the company since. Dean says, “Yeah... that’s how they get you”, before leaving to set up some more equipment. His response leaves Jake a little surprised.

5pm: The Sun is Setting

The sun is starting to go down, and Justin begins to become more nervous than before, although the others don't notice. Dean, Gus, and Jake have finished setting up the equipment, and the three of them are working with Gina to make sure the equipment is working properly. Satisfied, Gina announces that it is time to do the witness interview.

She sets up a couple chairs for her and Justin to sit on, and Jake and Dean move some lights to make sure Gina and Justin are properly lit. After that they move over a film camera with a microphone to record the interview. Gus monitors the equipment from the table by looking at the readouts on his tablet. Dean tells Jake that there need to be as few people as possible in the room to keep the paranormal readings, and the recording of the interview, free from false event data. Dean takes his paranormal response device and leads Jake out of the gallery by going through the doors that lead to the hallway by the main entrance. From there, they walk slowly and quietly down the hallway while looking at the display of Dean's paranormal response device to see if anything shows up. Neither of them notice the artwork lining the hallway, some of which display horrific and alien landscapes.

As Gina conducts the interview, Justin starts to become more and more impatient and agitated. Gina, at first, tries to ignore Justin's increasingly agitated behavior, but finally is forced to ask if he's all right. Gus notices this, and his normally outgoing personality becomes more reserved as he begins to sense tension between Justin and Gina. Justin begins to insist that the interview stop and that he needs to leave. Gina tries to calm him down, but he suddenly stands, knocking over his chair, and yelling loudly that he doesn't want to do the interview. This activates Gina's combative instinct and she stands, trying to talk over him to get him to sit back down and engage the interview. Gus, seeing the escalating

tension, gets between the two of them. Now much more reserved and quiet, he tries to calm them by example, and, after a moment, Gina and Justin calm down. Justin, somewhat passive aggressively, asks to go use the restroom before continuing the interview. Gus and Gina agree. Justin leaves through the door leading to the hallway by the main entrance. As Justin leaves, Gus checks to see if Gina is all right. Gina is grateful, and a bit shaken by the argument, but is otherwise fine.

As Justin walks through the hallway, he comes to an intersection that leads in one direction to the bathrooms, and in the other direction to Dean and Jake, who are standing by a metal door, looking at Justin. Dean asks if everything is all right, and Justin laughs and responds that it is just nerves, and that he just needed to go to the bathroom really badly; everything, he insists, is fine. Dean and Jake watch Justin go down the corridor to the bathrooms and disappear through a door. Dean and Jake look at each other. Jake suggests that something is wrong with Justin's behavior, and suggests he and Dean go and talk to Gina to see if she is all right. Dean agrees, and the two of them leave by heading down the hallway to the main entrance, retracing their path back to the gallery.

6pm: The Sun has Set

After waiting for Dean and Jake to walk back to the gallery, Justin leaves the bathroom and sneaks down the hallway until he reaches the large metal door Dean and Jake had been standing by when they saw him. This door leads to a stairwell that leads to the second floor. As he passes through the doorway, the door closes with a loud sound. Realizing he has little time, Justin rushes up the stairwell.

Just before this happens, Jake and Dean are talking to Gina and Gus, making sure that Gina is fine and asking about what happened with Justin. Jake, Dean and Gus hear the door close, but Gina is too emotionally distressed to notice right away. Jake volunteers to go check out the door, but Dean states that he doesn't think it's a good idea for Jake to go alone. Gina wants to decompress from the argument with Justin and wants to focus on some research. Gus agrees that the sound should be investigated, but he also thinks someone should stay with Gina and, at the very least, help her do some research; if nothing else, it will help her become calm.

Jake and Dean leave the gallery, but Jake suggests leaving through another door in the gallery; one that is closer to the location of the door in the hallway that Justin passed through. It leads to a part of the hallway that connects with the Performance Space and, like the rest of the hallway, has works of art adorning the hallway walls. As they walk through the hallway, Dean notices something about the paintings that hang on the walls and immediately mentions this to Jake. Some of the paintings are attributed to Justin Friendly and portray monstrous alien landscapes. The names of some of the paintings by Justin Friendly remind Dean of names from occult books he has read in the past. Jake asks about this, and Dean reveals that when he isn't doing paranormal investigations, he runs an occult bookstore. He uses this store to collect ancient books for study and sale to select

buyers. Unfortunately, business isn't very good, so he supplements his income with paranormal investigations. A closer look at Justin's paintings show that the paintings progress in quality over the course of 5 months, starting with paintings that Jake insists a child could create, and ending with paintings that have a deeply unsettling quality that no beginner artist could emulate.

Jake and Dean decide to continue on to the stairway door. When they reach the door, Dean pulls out a small revolver. Jake asks about the revolver, and Dean mentions it is a custom imitation of a Chiappa Firearms Rhino, the design modified to fire 32 caliber bullets instead of the larger caliber bullets that the authentic revolvers fire. As Dean checks the bullets, Jake realizes that the bullets are silver. Dean mentions that silver and gold have specific occult meanings. Gold represents earthly power, such as the sun, nobility and wealth. Silver represents spiritual power, such as the moon, and spiritual purity. This is why the old legends talk about vampires being bound by silver string, or werewolves killed by silver bullets. Jake asks how Dean can afford silver bullets. Dean responds that the company provided both the gun and the bullets, and shows Jake a small package of bullets that Dean carries as extra ammunition for the gun. Once enough investigations are undertaken, the employee is considered "graduated", and the employee is given an option to request custom equipment. Jake asks what kind of company it is that they are working for. Dean responds, "Yeah....". The two take defense positions by the door. Unnerved, Jake pulls out a 45 caliber semi-automatic pistol. Dean opens the door and enters first. The two carefully and warily walk up the staircase.

Gus and Gina are going over readings and data, when Gus suddenly notices that it is after 6pm. Gina is surprised, having been under the impression that is 5pm. As they discuss this, the EMF and other sensors go off, registering a spike in paranormal activity. As they go over the data, Gina and Gus hear another door close in another part of the hallway outside of the gallery. Gina begins to consider

the idea that Justin is been toying with them, a not uncommon experience. This inspires her to pull out a silver-plated studded bat from one of her equipment bags; if Justin is taunting them for his entertainment, she'll give him a silver-plated headache as a souvenir. Gus suggests going to check out the door together. If Gina is right, it would be better for the two of them to yell at Justin for toying with them, rather than split the two up and make them both individual targets. Gina and Gus exit through a door in the gallery closest to the door they heard closing. The exit leads to a part of the hallway which has a large metal door similar to the door that leads to the second floor stairs. As Gina walks to the door, Gus notices Justin's paintings. Gina and Gus stop to regard them, and with a look between the two of them it becomes clear that they no longer think they are being toyed with by Justin. The two continue on to the large door. Gina tries to open it, but the handle appears stuck.

Gina pulls out a credit card and starts fiddling with the door lock. As she fiddles with the door, the door suddenly unlocks. She is about to declare victory, when she hears something from the gallery. Gus, too busy watching Gina, didn't hear anything, but decides to quietly go one of the doorways into the gallery. Gina quickly suggests that they shouldn't split up, but Gus reassures her that he'll be careful. As he peers into the gallery from the doorway, he discovers that much of the equipment is now gone. Gus quickly sneaks back to Gina and explains that someone just stole their equipment when another sound of a door closing is heard. Gina says that it sounds like the door they heard earlier. Gus wonders if they should go check it out, but Gina says they should stop and plan out their next move before doing anything else.

While Gus and Gina talk, Dean and Jake exit the stairwell to the second floor. Dean exits first, then stops in surprise. Jake follows after him, and also stops in surprise. Instead of a second floor, they appear to be in some kind of outdoor

garden. There is a red tint to the sky and the environment as a whole, as if they walked into the smoldering remains of some fire whose red smoke has enveloped everything. The garden, although clearly in the manner of some expensive hedge maze, is only filled with dead vegetation, as if the heat made the plants wither, dry up, and die. Bits of dried leaves hang on dry branches before floating off into the air and finally lying still on the ground. Dean turns to Jake and tells him to be wary of some kind of attack; there is no way to tell what is real any more.

Behind Dean and Jake, the door closes, causing them to turn around quickly. A young girl, of exotic look, and breathless and frightened, looks back at them. She introduces herself as Elizabeth Tok. Justin had asked her and the others to stay out of the building, but she felt she had to come back as a personal item of great value was left behind. She begs Dean and Jake to help her get to her room. Both Dean and Jake are reluctant, but she assures them she knows how to navigate the illusions and get them to her room. Dean and Jake decide to play along.

Gina and Gus enter the gallery and find much of their equipment gone. There is the sound of wind chimes coming from outside the gallery, but without searching for it, the location is hard to discern. Gus wonders if they should investigate the sound, but Gina, worried about an impending attack, cautions that it would be better to get ready for a fight. Gina suddenly feels a moment of imbalance, and when she looks down, she sees that her bat has turned into a snake and crawling up her arm. She panics, and as the snake begins moving up her arm and past her shoulder, she begins to mutter her mantra, "This is an illusion! This is an illusion!". She closes her eyes and continues to mutter to herself, and, after a moment, opens her eyes to see that there is no snake, and that she is holding a bat. She glances over to Gus, who is looking intently at one of the walls of the gallery.

7pm: The Night Begins

Gus has noticed an unusual crack in the wall, with glittering light bouncing out of something hidden in the crack. Gina calls out to Gus, who tells her what he is seeing, even as he is moving closer to the illusory wall to investigate it. Gina tells Gus that if that crack existed before they would have noticed it earlier. On hearing this, Gus manages to pull himself out of the illusion, realizing in the moment that he was just staring at nothing but space. There is the sound of a door closing, and Gina and Gus look up.

Jacqui has entered the room from the hallway where the closed basement door was found. Jacqui was clearly human once, and from the looks of it, once had an athletic body. Now, her limbs are distorted, her face stretched into a broken-bone approximation of some animal form, with a hanging jaw filled with decayed teeth. Her flesh is blackened as if from exposure to chemicals, and has a cancerous and decayed look about it. Her arms are longer and her fingers stretched and more claw-like, her legs having the appearance of something that can leap and lunge, but with an overall body that moves with discomfort and awkwardness.

Gina wastes no time, and immediately lunges at Jacqui with her bat, but misses. Jacqui is so eager to avoid the silver bat that she practically hurtles herself out of the way. Despite this, her athletic body is too fast for Gina, and Jacqui strikes back, kicking Gina in the ribs, breaking something inside her. Gus grabs a chair and smashes Jacqui on the head with it, visibly deforming her skull. She turns to him, her skull reforming back into shape before his eyes, and back-hands him so hard that teeth eject from his mouth. Gina, unable to move well from the broken ribs, swings again at Jacqui, but Jacqui easily evades. Gina tries to swing again, but Jacqui evades again. Gus lunges at Jacqui, but she just pushes him off. Jacqui

moves to attack Gina, but the silver bat is still something she doesn't want contact with, so she only manages to push Gina around.

Gina, slow from her broken ribs is unable to swing the bat around in time for a follow-up attack by Jacqui, which results in a kick to the torso. The blow doesn't break any bones, but clearly it does some damage as Gina is now spitting up a stream of blood and coughing. Jacqui, sensing weakness, attacks again, but Gina is able to use the threat of the silver bat to scare Jacqui off. Jacqui tries to follow up with another attack, but Gina still is able to keep Jacqui at bay with the silver bat, and the best Jacqui can do is push Gina around, hoping to force her into an awkward defense position. Gus lunges, managing to push Jacqui away.

Unseen to both Gina and Gus, Tara has entered from another door to the gallery and is silently making her way to the group. Like Jacqui her flesh is dyed with blackened and her frame warped, but not in the same way as Jacqui; she lacks the obvious athletic body, and despite her clawed hands, she has relatively normal proportions. Her hair is a mixture of bleached white and stained from juices of rotting tissue of some kind. Gus turns and sees Tara, distracting him from noticing another attack by Jacqui on Gina. This time, Jacqui is able to strike Gina hard enough to force Gina to the ground. A brutal foot-stomp by Jacqui crushes Gina's skull, and the silver bat rolls away from her hand. Gus, furious, lunges at Jacqui, but she just shrugs him off. He spins to see Tara attacking, but Tara isn't as fast or as athletic as Jacqui, so Gus is able to get away from her. He lunges for the silver bat, but Jacqui kicks it away, howling in pain as soon as her foot makes contact with the silver plating. Her flesh sizzles and steams for a moment before subsiding. Gus decides to try and escape, but Tara gets in his way, allowing Jacqui to strike him from behind, breaking some ribs along his back. Jacqui strikes a second time, damaging his knee and almost forcing him to fall to the ground. Tara tries to attack

as well, but she isn't as physically powerful as Jacqui and her attack effectively blocks Jacqui until Gus is able to push her off.

The scramble places Gus closer to the bat, and he is able to grab it. He swings, but he is too injured to do anything but wild flailing, so Jacqui is able to evade easily. She attacks him, but, despite his inability to stand in a stable fashion, he is able to briefly block her with the bat. Jacqui attacks again, but Gus is getting desperate, and his wild flailing is just enough to hold off both Jacqui and Tara. Jacqui begins to wail in frustration, and attacks again, completely missing on the first try, thanks to the bat, but is able to move past it on the second try, ripping open Gus' throat with her claws. He gurgles as blood flows from his throat, then falls to the ground and dies.

Upstairs, Elizabeth is leading Dean and Jake through the garden, locating a door that seems to be standing free from any wall. She opens the door, and Dean and Jake see that there is a hallway beyond. Elizabeth leads them through the hallway to a door at the very end. Elizabeth asks if Dean or Jake can open the door for her, expressing a fear of the building itself. Dean is getting suspicious, and Jake smells a quick whiff of incense, and openly wonders what is on the other side. Elizabeth cries out, pleading for them to help. Deciding there is nothing else to be done, Jake volunteers to open the door for Elizabeth. As the door opens, both Dean and Jake see Justin in the middle of the room in a protection circle lined with candles and scrawled symbols. The air in the room is heavy with incense, and Justin is chanting. Upon seeing the door open, Justin screams in terror that they just broke the seal. Dean and Jake are taken aback when Elizabeth transforms into a monstrous shape similar to Tara and Jacqui and rushes into the room, destroying whatever ritual paraphernalia she can find.

Dean immediately pulls his gun and fires at Elizabeth. He only hits her with a glancing shot, but the silver bullets are enough to cause her pain. Jake follows

suite, firing at her and hitting her multiple times, but aside from jerking from the physical impact, she seems unhurt. Understanding that Dean's silver bullets are the greater threat, Elizabeth picks up a chair and throws it at Dean, but he is able to evade. He fires twice at her, hitting her both times, causing enraged screams of pain as her wounds sizzle from silver bullets lodged in them. Jake fires more regular bullets into Elizabeth knocking her down long enough for Dean to rush over and shoot her in the head, killing her permanently.

Justin is panicking. He screams that without the ritual, he is vulnerable to the same thing that killed the other artists and transformed them. Dean demands to know what was going on in Justin's room; to Dean it looks like an occult den. Justin ignores him, pleading that they all need to leave. Jake has had enough and grabs Justin, intimidating and threatening him for holding back. Justin breaks down and admits that he created the ritual to protect himself from whatever is controlling the building. He explains that it is only active after sundown and, using the ritual, Justin was protected during the same time the entity was active. Dean demands to know what Justin knows about the entity, but Justin insists he knows nothing other than how to defend from it. He begs for them all to leave. Jake tries his hand at scaring the information out of Justin, but Justin continues his pleas to leave. Dean agrees to leave, but threatens to make sure Justin doesn't come with them. Justin responds with shameless pleas for help.

Jake suddenly gets a thought, and asks if Justin summoned the entity. Justin's horrified look allows Dean to realize what has happened: Justin was summoning something to aid in his paintings, but he lost control and it, for some unknown reason, took control of the building and the other artists. Without any recourse, Justin called the company Jake and Dean work for in order stop the entity on his behalf. On hearing this, Justin breaks down, admitting everything - he used to be a low-level executive at a no-name insurance firm before having a nervous

breakdown. He decided to quit his job and become an artist. He joined the co-op and even helped fund it, but never felt like he truly belonged; his artwork was childish compared to the others and he felt like he was a pretender among professionals.

In desperation, Justin remembered some occult books he had been keeping since college and tried out some of the rituals. These rituals allowed him to see things that he could copy and paint and pass off as visionary works. When the others asked how he developed so fast, he had to show off: he gathered them together for a group ritual that involved singing and dancing in a form of religious ecstasy. While the other artists took part, Dennis, the handyman watched the show. At some point during the ritual, Justin lost control and something manifested and instantly killed everyone except Justin. He was able to escape to his room and turn it into a space for protection that enabled him to wait out the entity until dawn. The down side, however, is that he had to enact the ritual all night, and thus has not been able to sleep as he should. Without any idea of what else to do, he contacted the company, hoping that they could stop the entity while at the same time passing himself as a hapless victim rather than a participant.

Dean is outraged. He screams that Justin has killed them all with his selfishness and stupidity. Jake gets between the two, arguing for calm. Dean suddenly remembers Gina and Gus, and realizes they need to get back to them. Jake tells Dean they need to stop for a moment and come up with a plan; just blindly running around reacting to everything will get them killed. Jake tells Justin to tell Dean and himself what to expect. As Jake is talking to Dean, Dean feels a sense of imbalance, and begins to hallucinate. Dean sees winged beasts fly out of nowhere and attack him. Their speed makes details hard to make out except for their glistening fangs. Dean panics, but quickly realizes that he is hallucinating, and upon realizing this, the hallucination ends. Jake is asking Dean what just happened, when he too

begins to feel unbalanced and starts to hallucinate. He begins to see fingers sprouting from his hand, continuing up his arm, and then across his body, moving independently of him and trying to smother him. In a stubborn rage, he begins to bite off as many fingers as he can, and in so doing, ceases to hallucinate. He returns to reality with Dean asking if he is okay from the the experience. Justin tells them that these hallucinations aren't an attempt to kill them. The entity was buying time. Dean asks Justin what the entity was buying time for, and in that instant the door to Justin's room is ripped off the hinges, and Leroy, the monstrous incarnation of someone who was clearly a weight-lifter in life, enters the room.

11pm: The Deep Darkness of Night

Leroy throws the door at Jake, who manages to duck out of the way. Dean fires a bullet into Leroy, distracting Leroy with pain as the silver bullet sizzles the meat surrounding the bullet. Jake follows up, hitting Leroy with a regular bullet, and the close proximity jerks Leroy around, even though he doesn't seem particularly hurt. Jake fires again, followed by Dean, both unable to miss due to the constrained space of the room. Dean tries to fire again, but realizes he is out of ammunition. Deeply injured by the silver bullets, Leroy tries to attack Dean, but isn't quite able to make contact. Leroy strikes a second time, slamming Dean into the wall, clearly harming Dean internally in some way.

Jake shoots Leroy in the head, temporarily dropping him. Dean quickly pulls out the case of bullets he carries with him and reloads his gun. He then shoots Leroy in the head, then replaces the used bullet casing with a new silver bullet. Dean tells Jake that they need to figure out how the entity operates so that they can understand how to deal with it. Jake agrees and turns to Justin, who tells them that Jacqui enjoyed martial arts, and Tara ran the co-op. Dustin was hired as a handyman for the building's maintenance. Justin also tells them that the entity has full control of the building until dawn and can rearrange the inside of the building to anything it wishes, and at will.

Dean has heard enough. He is insistent that he and Jake find their way back to Gina and Gus, otherwise he will feel that he and Jake have abandoned the two. Jake responds that he doesn't think this is a good idea, but he also sees that Dean won't be talked out of it. Jake grabs Justin, and the three head for the door. When Dean opens the door, the three stop. Beyond the door there is nothing but a black void.

Dean picks up a fallen candle and throws it out the doorway. The candle disappears without a sound into the blackness. Justin notes that it is the Entity. It is

done playing with them and is ready to finish things. Jake makes the sad observation that this means Gina and Gus are likely dead. Jake decides the room needs to be rearranged for a better defense. He and Dean take a bookcase, a table, and some drawers and use them to blockade the door. Pushing Justin to the back of the room, Jake and Dean take the bed frame and turn it on its side, forming a defensive barrier. Jake instructs Dean that he needs to open the case of silver bullets and keep them loose in his pocket to make reloading faster. Dean looks at Jake and asks how much gun training Jake has had. Jake responds that he has been shooting guns since a child. Although afraid of giving up his best weapon, Dean decides his gun and bullets are better served being used by Jake. Jake thanks Dean for his trust, and hands over his own handgun to Dean. While Jake instructs Dean on how to handle a larger caliber weapon, Justin hides in a corner in the back, afraid of what is to come.

Jake checks his watch and notes the time, although he feels like they haven't waiting the many hours the watch suggests. Both of them are feeling exhausted now that the adrenaline no longer running through their systems. Dean, in particular, is feeling the weight of his injuries and is having a hard time staying awake. Just as Jake tries to keep Dean focused, the barricade at the doorway explodes into the room as Tara and Jacqui rush in, with Dustin close behind. Jake fires and immediately hits Tara. Dean tries to shoot as well, but he isn't used to the higher caliber weapon and misses completely due to the strength of the weapon. Jacqui picks up a piece of debris, and throws it at Dean it hits him in the head, with just enough strength to stumble him.

Jacqui attacks Jake, trying to pin his gun arm, but during the struggle he manages to shoot her in the head, killing her. Dean manages to shoot Tara in the chest, knocking her down, but Dustin lunges at Dean, who is not strong enough to do anything but struggle with Dustin's attack. Jake aims at Dustin, but Dustin

shoves Dean at Jake, causing Jake's shot to miss. Dustin then lunges at Jake, but Jake manages to trip Dustin, giving him the chance to shoot Dustin in the head, killing him. Tara recovers and slashes Jake with her claws, cutting him severely. Jake shoots her in the shoulder, causing her to leap away in pain. Dean, almost delirious from his injuries, fires at Tara, but misses, and forces Jake to take cover. Tara takes advantage of this and slashes Jake again, cutting him as deeply, doubling his injuries. He tries to shoot Tara, but she pins his gun hand, causing him to miss. Dean shoots her at point-blank range, but aside from the physical impact, she ignores him. The brief wobble from the gunshot, however, allows Jake to push Tara off and he shoots her in the head, finally killing her. He checks the chamber of his gun and sees there is only one bullet left. An exhausted quiet fills the room. Jake takes some silver bullets out of his pocket and reloads the gun.

6am: Morning Comes

Dean, Jake, and Justin slowly walk into the silent gallery and see the dead bodies of Gina and Gus. Dean sadly picks up the silver-plated bat. He tells Jake to hold on to the gun and silver bullets; Dean will hold on to the bat and use the company's app to order new weapon supplies. Dean is silent for a moment, then says he is tired of seeing so many people die. Jake asks why Dean still works for the company, to which Dean responds that he has been working for the company for so long that there are files on him with the police and the news media, making it impossible to get a regular job. He finishes with "I don't know... I just got stuck."

Dean and Jake head toward the exit, when Justin tries to intercept them just before they finally leave the building. He begs them to stay and help him. Dean asks why Justin hasn't simply left on his own. Justin responds tearfully with "I can't...". Dean hypothesizes that when Justin accidentally summoned the entity, he somehow bound it to him. Dean suggests that Justin's problem won't end until he or the entity somehow break that connection. Justin asks what he should do; he tried to stop the entity by burning the book he used to summon it, and he has been trapped so long that he has run out of food.

Unable to think of any solution, and in no shape to do anything else, Dean simply, sadly, says "Goodbye, Justin". He and Jake leave the building. As Dean and Jake stumble out of the building, Dean pulls out his smartphone. Jake asks what he is doing, and Dean responds that, for authorized users, the app can be used to call an ambulance. Their injuries will count as evidence of the event, and they will probably get bonuses, provided they live long enough for the ambulance to reach them.

Jake's car is closer, so they weakly stumble over to it. Jake struggles to get into the driver's seat and unlocks the passenger door for Dean. As they sit in the car, injured, bleeding, and waiting for the ambulance to save them, Dean says,

"One more thing..."

Jake asks "What?", and Dean responds,

"Happy Graduation Day."

THE CHARACTERS

JUSTIN FRIENDLY

Justin Friendly was originally, in his mind, a nobody. A nameless low-level executive at some forgettable insurance firm, Justin became obsessed with his mediocrity until it culminated in a nervous breakdown. Deciding that he had to “Be Somebody”, he had his name legally changed to “Justin Friendly” for marketing purposes and helped finance the artist co-op that was planned and envisioned by Tara Engels. Unfortunately for Justin, he did not have the experience of Tara when it came to running an artist co-op and business, so he had to defer to her on several occasions, which led to a quiet resentment. He was intimidated by the other artists as well, due to individual characteristics as well as their greater experience in art. This led to more resentment and a feeling of imposter syndrome.

After some low-quality attempts to make art, Justin remembered his days in college when he messed around with classmates in the occult. After finding some books on the subject hidden away in storage, he began using the rituals he found in one of the books to receive visions of eldritch worlds and beings that he then started to copy into his artwork.

The effect was immediate and, while unsettling, his artwork began to gain serious notice. After finally being pressed on how his sudden increase in quality was possible, Justin’s ego got the best of him, and he revealed the books and rituals he had been using. As a way of including the others, he offered to lead them through a group ritual to create what he thought would be a shared hallucination. With varying degrees of interest, the other artists agreed. Unfortunately, Justin had overestimated himself. When the ritual reached its height, a doorway was somehow opened that allowed an unknown entity to come forth. The entity immediately killed everyone in the area besides Justin, who, seemingly, barely escaped with his life.

Justin, in a panic, burned the book with the necessary information on the ritual, hoping it would banish the entity. When it became clear this would not happen, Justin searched his other books and found a ritual to keep the entity and its minions at bay during the night when it was at full power. After attempting to leave the building, Justin found that he somehow could not bring himself to do so, and finally realized he was trapped in the building with the entity, perhaps permanently. At this point, Justin called an unnamed organization that utilized an app to send gig workers over to investigate paranormal activities, which begins the story.

TARA ENGELS

Tara Engels was not just an artist, but someone experienced with the art business and with building art communities. She was already assembling artists for a new co-op project when she met Justin Friendly and, despite his obvious lack of ability, welcomed him into the group. When Justin offered to finance the co-op, she was not only grateful, but more or less obligated to keep him as part of the project. Although she saw that he would get agitated when she and the other artists would try to help him develop his art skills, she had no idea he resented her authority as the leader of the co-op. Like the others, she was impressed with his sudden artistic growth, if somewhat disturbed by his imagery. When he offered to show everyone a group ritual, she agreed, thinking it would be a good bonding exercise.

As with the others, Tara was killed when Justin lost control of the entity he had unwittingly summoned by the ritual. Although she died, the entity kept control of her body, including her mind, and proceeded to use her preserved knowledge for its own ends. Like the others, her body was mutated into a more violent form. When the story begins, Tara Engels no longer exists, but her body and memories are used by the entity much like that of a puppet-master with a puppet. Based on her knowledge, the entity assigned her a role that is a warped version of her role in life - she leads the rest of the victims of the entity, coordinating them according to the entity's will. At the beginning of the story, she is in the basement with the other puppets and comes through the basement door with the others at nightfall to begin coordinating the others in hunting anyone else inside the building.

ELIZABETH TOK

The youngest of the group of artists in the co-op, Elizabeth had a look that Justin found exotic. She was fond of peaceful, but experimental works, and like the others tried to help Justin in his development, but was slightly intimidated by him as well. Elizabeth did not really want to take part in the ritual, but, upon seeing how proud Justin was of his development, decided to join in as a way of supporting him and not being rude.

When the entity broke through and killed everyone except Justin, Elizabeth was killed and transformed into some mockery of a seductress based on Justin's impressions. The entity gave her the ability to cast illusions to hide her now mutated form, and would use her to try and lure Justin out. When Elizabeth (or rather, her body as a puppet for the entity) encounters Jake and Dean in the story, these powers of illusion are used to trick them into helping to break down the door to Justin's room - something that Elizabeth could not do herself. At the beginning of the story, when night falls, she exits the basement along with the others, but moves more directly towards Justin's room, as she does every night.

JACQUI LANDERS

Jacqui Landers was one of the artists in the co-op. Her specialty involved sculptures and poetry, neither of which Justin found particularly interesting. What caught his eye, however was her toned body from kickboxing classes that she took when she was not working on art. Always eager to try something new, Jacqui agreed to Justin's ritual, only to be slaughtered like the others when the entity burst forth. Her body was mutated into a more violent and monstrous form like the others, but based on Justin's impressions of her, the entity made her a particularly dangerous creature, with high agility and speed to better kill her prey. Like the other victims, her body is stored in the basement until nightfall, at which point she emerges to either be coordinated by Tara or to hunt down the nearest living being.

LEROY HAMMOND

At the time of being alive, Leroy was a friendly person who enjoyed art and working out under the philosophy that a healthy mind came from a healthy body. Given his height and his muscle mass, Justin found him to be somewhat intimidating, although that was never the intention of Leroy. Initially, Leroy tried to help Justin with his artwork, but, like the others, he soon backed off given the irritated response Justin often gave to attempts to help him.

Like the others, Leroy was killed when the entity was inadvertently summoned by the group ritual that Justin had convinced everyone to take part in. In the case of Leroy, the entity used Justin's impressions of Leroy to create a mutated hulking figure; a kind of living tank that would be used to assault any unprotected person caught in the co-op after dark. Like the others, Leroy is "stored" in the basement, and leaves with the others after nightfall.

DENNIS TRAY

Dennis was unique among the residents in the co-op in that he was not an artist, but the resident handyman. His job was to maintain the building and fix anything that needed repairs. Most of the artists treated him with respect, although Justin was somewhat distant, having thought of Dennis as somewhat beneath him. Dennis was oblivious to this, however, as he enjoyed just being around artists and all their art.

When Justin convinced the other artists to take part in the ritual, Dennis stood some distance away, just intending to watch. Unfortunately, this was not enough to save him when the entity broke through and killed everyone in the room. Based on Justin's impressions, the entity mutated and warped Dennis into a creature that is still dangerous, but mostly acts as a support creature to the others. The entity tends to use the Dennis to sneak around and sabotage a target in preparation for an attack by other more powerful tools of the entity like Jacqui Landers, or Leroy Hammond. When not in use, Dennis is left in the basement with the others.

GINA MACALLISTER

One of the paranormal researchers from “The Company”, Gina Macallister is a scientist that has been ostracized by the scientific community for her studies of paranormal phenomena. To make ends meet, and to have a context for more research, she signed up as a gig worker for the unnamed company and began receiving assignments through a phone app. Being “graduated” means that Gina is cleared for more dangerous assignments, which also happens to provide her more research. As a “graduated” gig worker, she has certain features unlocked in the app that allow her to order special equipment, such as the silver-plated studded baseball bat. At the start of the story, Gina exhibits a friendly, outgoing personality, but this hides darker awareness of the threats she is assigned to investigate.

DEAN SONGHAM

Like Gina, Dean is a “graduated” worker. He became a gig worker for “The Company” after trying to start an occult bookstore that catered both to the general public and to specialized clientele. Unfortunately, business was not as strong as he had hoped and Dean was forced to find alternate sources of income while developing his business.

Over time, he has come to suspect that the company behind the app is somehow suppressing potential customers for his business. Nevertheless, he sees no way out; at the start of the story, he has worked for the nameless company long enough that there are multiple records of him with the police, the media, and other parties. Simply put, he feels he has no way of leaving the gig work without going bankrupt. In addition, Dean has been through so many assignments in such a short time that he has developed an ongoing nervousness, and a slight paranoia. That said, he is still relatively stable.

GUS TABERN

Gus Tabern is one of gig workers for the nameless company that has not yet “graduated”. A tech-head, he somehow found out about the app and signed up to perform gig work. He then leveraged his knowledge of technology to create systems of sensory and tracking devices that can be controlled from his tablet. A fun, somewhat audacious person, he was selected to be one of the “candidates for graduation” at the start of the story. Prior to this, his experience with paranormal research mostly revolved around people who were either just imagining things, or claiming paranormal activity to feel special in some way. As such, he is not completely prepared for the events that are about to take place.

JAKE HARDWICK

A prepper, Jake came to the nameless company while overhearing a conversation about it one night at a local bar. For Jake, prepping is as much personal entertainment as it is a necessity, but with a fallout shelter project only partially complete, it is an expensive hobby. Because of this, when Jake sensed an opportunity to make some extra money, he took it. Unknown to him, however, the conversation he overheard might have been part of a covert recruitment process. Regardless, prior to the start of the story, Jake has only been on assignments involving people who are frauds, misguided, or mentally unwell but otherwise harmless. The assignment in the story is the first in which he experiences true paranormal phenomena, and in which he becomes “graduated”.

THE ENTITY

The Entity is a being of unknown origin or nature, having been summoned by Justin Friendly after he convinced the other artists to join him in a group ritual. Unfortunately, Justin did not quite know what he was doing and summoned up “something” that he neither understood nor was able to control. The Entity subsequently killed everyone present aside from Justin and took control of the basement level of the co-op.

Unbeknownst to Justin, the Entity is not simply some non-physical, amorphous being. Upon breaking through, the Entity took the “form” of Justin’s thoughts and wishes, transforming the other people present into monstrous forms of Justin’s interpretation of them. Because of this, the Entity and Justin are linked; something that Justin himself doesn’t understand. Indeed, upon realizing what he had done, Justin burned the book he used to summon the Entity, removing the possibility of knowing what the Entity was, or its nature. Furthermore, because of the link between the two, neither Justin nor the Entity can leave the co-op. While Justin hides alone in his bedroom on the upper floor, the Entity has taken over the basement, where it also stores the bodies of those it has killed, using them as puppets. Whether or not one can be freed by the destruction of the other is not known, but by the beginning of the story, the Entity has made repeated attempts to attack Justin, who is able to fend the Entity off with a protection spell that he invokes at night, when the Entity is active. By the end of the story, the fates of both are still unknown as the Entity is still active, and the remaining paranormal investigators have no choice but to leave and let Justin remain in the building until his ultimate end.